

Comments on Lauren Perry's "A Victim by Any Other Name?"

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1. SUMMARY

Rae Langton's examples

The bride telling the groom "I do":

Locutionary act: the bride uttering "I do."

Perlocutionary act/effect: by uttering "I do," the bride "greatly distressed" her mother.

Iallocutionary act/force: in uttering "I do," the bride marries the groom.

Pornography (MacKinnon):

Locutionary act: depicting women's sexual subordination.

Perlocutionary act/effect: contributing to women's subordination.

Iallocutionary act/force: pornography itself *constitutes* an act of subordination (at least, it unfairly ranks women as sexual objects and legitimizes sexual violence).

Lauren's analysis

Blaming the victim:

Locutionary act: blaming the victim.

Perlocutionary act/effect: changing the blamee's behavior & subordinating women.

Iallocutionary act/force: blame & subordination.

Calling out victim-blaming:

Locutionary act: calling out victim-blaming.

Perlocutionary act/effect: challenging the social definition of rape, restoring the blamee's moral authority, etc.

Iallocutionary act/force: protest.

2. QUESTION

Understandably, Lauren's account focuses on the subordination of *women*. I'd love to invite Lauren to consider how the analysis might be extended to work for

- a) trans men and nonbinary persons who are misperceived as women; and
- b) trans women who are deliberately misgendered as "really men merely pretending to be women" or "discovered" to be "men disguised as women."

3. WORRIES

(1) *Is victim-blaming continuous with ordinary cases of blaming?*

Lauren suggests yes: just like ordinary cases of blaming, the point of victim-blaming is to inspire remorse. I'm worried that this way of approaching victim-blaming misses out on a salient *gaslighting* element.

Often, the illocutionary force of victim-blaming is not to inspire remorse, but to control, to manipulate, to minimize, to *get away*.

Example: the “trans panic defense,” popularized by the brutal 2002 murder of the 17-year-old transgender girl Gwen Araujo in the SF Bay Area.

(2) *How does calling out victim-blaming resist victim-blaming?*

Whether calling out victim-blaming has the illocutionary force of protest depends on its uptake, and I worry that it's way too easy to end up in a situation where calling out victim-blaming may not be taken up as protest to begin with.

Analogy: dismissal of #MeToo as whining, as a feminist coup, as anything *but* protest.

Calling out victim-blaming, then, may not be as useful a strategy for resistance as Lauren's discussion seems to imply it might be?

And even if calling out victim-blaming is taken up as protest, there may still be further problems with over-reliance on the social norms surrounding victimhood.

The “pathetic victim” does not seem very empowering. The “heroic victim” feeds into problematic requirements of force in legal definitions of rape. Too many victims are not perfect.

Victimhood is racialized; socially, women of color are not as “pure,” if not more “seductive” and thus more blameworthy.

Victimhood is also unavailable to trans women, especially trans women of color.